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ABSTRACT

Frequently, the expectations placed on education can lead to confusion over its mission. How one college president, at career end, views the purpose of education is presented in this address. The paper details how educators have tried to meet myriad demands in the face of eroding social support systems, claiming that educators must limit their concerns to those held by people who have the greatest stake in education: students and parents, employers, and postsecondary schools. It looks at parents' directives and how difficult it can be to reconcile these demands with the educational mission. The paper cites examples of what business leaders want from education, such as autonomous learners and good communicators, and describes how educational administration shares many of the same features of management elsewhere, such as in its authority structures, the complexity of communication, and the rigors of evaluation, all of which influence academic administration as much as it does business management. The emphasis here is on the inherent incompatibility of university management: the university depends on freedom and diverse views while management relies on control and unified vision. In the face of such contradictory demands, educational managers are advised to set up their own expectations and work to fulfill those goals. (RJM)

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THE CONFUSING EXPECTATIONS FOR EDUCATION

By

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Presented at the Professional Development Day of the Teachers' Federation of Carleton

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R. Farquhar

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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THE CONFUSING EXPECTATIONS FOR EDUCATION

The invitation which I accepted to speak to you this morning suggested that I address two seemingly different topics: my views on education at various levels, and my experiences at Carleton as I near the end of my term as President. Initially, I couldn't conceive of how to incorporate both of these subjects into a unified presentation, and I experienced considerable confusion as I struggled with that assignment. But then I discovered a unifying element that would serve the purpose; it was confusion itself. So I am going to talk about both subjects under the general rubric of "confusing expectations for education," and then I hope there will be time for you to raise some questions and make some comments.

Some Views on Education

My first teaching job was as a part-time instructor at UBC more than 35 years ago. After a couple of years at that, I left the university to take a full-time appointment at a Grade 7-12 school in Sooke, just outside Victoria, where for 2 years I served variously as boys' counsellor and basketball coach, sponsor of the student newspaper and yearbook, and teacher of grade 7 Guidance, grade 9 French, grade 10 Math and English, grade 11 and 12 English, and (in my final year there) head of the English Department - all with a mixture of students who included some from logging towns and fishing villages that rode school buses for up to 3 hours each way. I was completing a Master's

thesis in English at the time, but I had never had a single course in teacher education, so I was naive, keen, and fascinated.

One of the things that interested me most was what the school was expected to do, and I soon learned that there were a lot of different folks who legitimately held expectations for education but who didn't always agree with one another. I became sufficiently enticed by the confused role of these organizations that I decided to study them more systematically, so I went off to The University of Chicago for a Ph.D. in Educational Administration - a mind-expanding and vocabulary-enriching experience if there ever was one. And since then I've devoted my career to the study, teaching, and practice of management in education; but those 30 years have left me more rather than less confused about the expectations for education.

At one point when I was Dean of Education at the University of Saskatchewan in the 1970s, I presented a speech at a professional development event for the Saskatchewan Council on Educational Administration which was titled "What Should The School Be Doing and How Far Can It Go?" and it included such comments as:

> "specifically, students believed that schools existed mainly to provide them with skills needed for immediate employment, and job counselling; teachers and the public saw the former as a low-priority goal, and the

> latter as not a task for the secondary schools. The public ranked developing responsible citizens slightly lower in importance than basic skills, but the teachers and students did not see it as that important. Teachers rated personal worth, skills in processing information, and understanding and coping with change as much more important than the other two groups. When these three groups hold different expectations for the school, and when, in some cases, these expectations are not met, disappointment and disillusionment with the schooling process may result."
>
> And despite our obvious entry upon a period of educational retrenchment...,we seem to keep encouraging a growth of expectations for what we can do. For example,...I have heard demands for the schools to increase their offerings in health and physical education, drug and sex education, legal education, economic education, special education, adult education, education of native people, education for the arts, outdoor education with field trips, agricultural education, bilingual and multicultural education, Canadian studies, religion and ethics, environmental education, consumer education, education for jobs with work-study programs, and "the basics" (whatever that means). There are ardent advocates and pressure groups for almost everything. And always the cry is for us to do more.

I went on to conclude that, because it is impossible for our schools to meet all of these expectations, there is a need for educators to choose among those which they are uniquely qualified to meet and those whose satisfaction should be left to other social service agencies in the community.

Well, educators have not clearly made these choices; they are still trying to meet all of those expectations and more as our traditional social support systems have broken down even further during the past two decades while immigration has diversified, technology has mushroomed, and the economy has

weakened. Too many of your students need to be fed, to be clothed, to be bandaged and referred (physically and psychologically). The demands upon education are now greater than ever and our school systems are the only entities with a chance of addressing them. So I've changed my mind: our schools must confront the challenges posed by the impossibly complex requirements of preparing people to cope in contemporary society, simply because it has to be done and no other agency can do it.

Nevertheless, while grappling with all of the problematic by-products of a social system that doesn't work well any more, we must never forget that schools are fundamentally <u>educational</u> institutions and that they need to ensure above all that teaching and learning take place because, if they don't, nothing else that you do will really matter very much. So the big question is: What kind of teaching and learning? And because most of education is a <u>public</u> enterprise, you must look to the expectations that society holds to determine what your students should know and be able to do when you're through with them in order to answer that question.

Now, society is a complicated construct, and its expectations of such a fundamentally important function as education are virtually unlimited. Every interest group - every individual - has a view, and those views are frequently

irrational and often conflicting. So to seek some kind of orderly guidance you must limit your concern to those that are held by people who have the most direct stakes in what you do - the recipients of your "products" like employers and post-secondary institutions, the experts in your profession like yourselves and scholars in the field of education, the people designated to carry the public trust in determining what you do like provincial officials and local boards, and the parents of pupils placed in your care along with the students themselves. What are the expectations that these groups, all with legitimate interests, hold for education? A clear and coherent answer to this question will surely provide the guidance you need in practising your craft.

So what are these expectations? Let me quote from a few publications I have recently come across, and you can guess which groups issued them. Here's one:

> The revolutionary changes in the world of work demand that our schools go far beyond the "3 Rs" to create a new, broader set of "basics" that enable them to cope with the complexity wrought by accelerating change - including the ability to engage in Systems Thinking, to utilize technology in learning, to work cooperatively in high-performance teams, and to actively acquire new skills as needed.
>
> .....
>
> Every child can learn; and we need to greatly increase our expectations of all students.
>
> But to enable students to meet those heightened expectations, we need to replace today's assembly-line

lockstep with an approach called "self-directed learning" that is based upon principles of discovery, meaning-making and constructivism - the natural love of learning every person is born with.

.....

Using self-directed learning, each student with the help of teachers and parents, develops an individualized learning plan against which progress is assessed by the student, and monitored by the teacher and parent. The lockstep grade structure and high-stakes testing at the end of the year, give way to an ungraded structure with fewer tests, mostly for diagnostic purposes. Certificates of mastery are awarded as students demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

.....

Schools will utilize new technologies, not as a cure-all in themselves, but to create learning environments that accommodate individual differences in learning speeds and styles.

.....

Another example is the current belief that a system of national or regional standardized tests can assure higher learning standards. Such exams may have been a good thing 30 years ago. Now, however, the need is for a new system of learning with assessment built into the learning process - not imposed from without. Norm-referenced, standardized tests will serve to produce more of what we have been getting - memorization of bits and pieces of information, rather than learners who know how to learn.

.....

We must also suspend some of the specific "reform" goals, such as increased pressure for more standardized tests which will actually make it more difficult to change the system, and take new policy steps that empower innovation.

Which group would you attribute those statements to -

university theorists, corporate employers, professional educators, government officials, or students' parents? Well, it may surprise you (it did me) to know that those comments appear in a document recently published by the self-styled "world's premier audit, tax and business advisory firm" - Arthur Andersen - which surely speaks for the world of corporate employers.

Or consider this one: "...my sense of a new paradigm of learning places the learner in the centre of the matrix as a self-managed, personally motivated consumer...progressively, the learner adjusts learning goals as needs evolve based on a cumulative record of learning and experience...." Surely that was written by a professional educator. Wrong again. It is drawn from a speech to a national leadership conference of entrepreneurially inclined university students of business and economics by the President of Canada's Corporate-Higher Education Forum, a body of C.E.O.'s from those organizations that receive the "products" of your schools. Yet, it sounds more like the credo of the progressive education movement half-a-century ago than the back-to-basics, normative-testing, competition-oriented mantra that most of us probably still associate with the private sector. What a reversal!

Here's a report on another viewpoint:

> Their mission is to rescue a beleaguered liberal

> education, Canadian-style, from its dismissal as parochial and ethnocentric by critics on the left and impractical by those on the right.
>
> .....
>
> Similarly, they are not averse to linking education to everyday life. Caring "how society is organized to correspond to human needs" is the core of what they mean by liberal education. But that does not mean schools should be in the business of providing job skills. Quite aside from the question of whether tax payers should be subsidizing business productivity, job requirements change so rapidly that even the notion of a fluid curriculum linked to whatever is perceived as current market requirements, and to modish management-speak about virtual schools and just-in-time teaching, is ludicrous.
>
> Outcome-based learning, which plugs curriculum into a predetermined agenda, "does not form the substance of faith or trust or friendship, without which no true justice is possible; it overlooks the longing for transcendence...."

This perspective must emanate from within the teaching profession itself. But not so. These are the views expressed in a book recently published by two influential professors of political science at Carleton University. One of them has gone considerably farther by putting our money where his mouth is. This fall, Carleton will introduce a new four-year undergraduate honours degree program - the Bachelor of Humanities - which has been designed by Professor Emberley and will be offered through the just established College of the Humanities. It will depart dramatically from the cafeteria style of the B.A. approach to liberal education and offer a highly structured and intellectually demanding curriculum of great books, history,

philosophy, literature, and languages - including mastery of a second language - and we anticipate that the demand for admission from qualified students will exceed several times over the 100 places to which its first-year enrolment will be limited. This is a far cry from the "give us some students who can write a grammatically correct sentence" bleat that is more typically associated with my colleagues in higher education.

Again, which sector do you think has proposed a project that

> will concentrate heavily on the social issues involved in "telelearning",...such issues as how elementary-school-aged children will best benefit from new technology[?] How would you engage their interest? How would you keep the boys in the class from hogging the computers and ensure the full participation of girls, who might be more interested in relationships than technology?..."Central to the telelearning approach are the concepts of knowledge building, collaborative learning and other advanced learning strategies based on active rather than passive learning to create new knowledge."

This proposal should have come from somewhere within the education establishment - a Ministry, a Teachers' Federation, or a Faculty of Education. Wrong once more. It defines the role of one of the new national Networks of Centres of Excellence which is led by two professors, one in the School of Communication and one in the Centre for Systems Science, at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C. Carleton is an active participant in that project too, and we don't even <u>have</u> a Faculty of Education; we're involved through our Faculty of Engineering. So once more, our

stereotypical attribution of expectations for education breaks down.

To cite one more example, surely it's the business sector that has recently called for provincial standards in education, standardized report cards, standardized tests for numeracy and literacy skills at several stages from grade 3 to grade 11, and an independent "accountability office" to develop and evaluate province-wide tests. No, we can't hang those "reactionary" demands on the leaders of corporate Canada because you know better than I do that these are among the announcements emanating from within the education establishment itself through our own Ontario Ministry. My, how the spots change!

So what is happening here? You can't depend any longer on your major stakeholders to hold the expectations for education that they are supposed to hold: employers are becoming humanized, universities are becoming liberalized, and the education establishment is embracing competitive skill-testing. It's confusing, but I think there's room for hope that ultimately it will be converging. If that occurs, then we may eventually get the coherence of guidance that you need in meeting the expectations held for your work.

The only sectors in which there seems to be some continuity of expectations are those of parents and the students themselves, but here today's realities are such that they seem doomed to disappointment. Parents, I think, want what they've always wanted from schools - children who are happy and who develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to succeed in the working world. Unfortunately, their happiness is threatened by the recent escalation of violence in our schools, and their employability is diminished by the current decline of job opportunities in our economy. And your students - more than anything else, and more than ever before - want from our schools the warmth, empathy, support, and even love that many of them at present get far too little of at home - they want an occasional hug; but you no longer dare touch them. Thus, it is increasingly difficult to meet the expectations of your principal "clients".

What, then, can be done? You can't meet the expectations of your principal "clients" and you can't predict those of your other major stakeholders. This is indeed a confusing predicament. My advice to you in these circumstances is simple: trust your own judgement and be true to yourselves. The most important expectations for your performance are your own. You are professionals, trained in your craft and experienced in your métier, and no one knows better than you what you should do in the numerous situations you face daily, how you should do it, and

whether or not you've done it well. You are competent members of a crucial profession, fully capable of discharging your responsibilities individually and of governing yourselves collectively - as has recently been publicly recognized by establishing the Ontario College of Teachers. In the final analysis, the most important expectations for education are those held by the person you see in the mirror every day.

So keep your nerve and don't lose your confidence. We are all depending on you, and you might be surprised at how many of us trust you.

Review of University Presidencies

Now, in shifting to the other topic I was asked to discuss - a review of my experiences as I prepare to leave the university presidency - I'll ease the transition by sharing with you - as I have already done with my faculty colleagues at Carleton, so I apologize if you have heard it before - some observations on the confusion that characterizes my role. You are not alone in confronting confusing expectations; you are joined by all of us who have ever tried to run an institution of higher education.

Not long ago, I was invited to speak at a meeting of the Presidents' Club, a group of corporate C.E.O.'s in the national capital region who come together several times a year to share

their views and derive mutual support in their roles as senior managers of complex organizations. Recognizing that universities are important and visible organizations in the community which remain somewhat opaque to the outside observer, they were interested in finding out what it is like to manage such an institution - probably on the theory that misery loves company. And because they were aware that I had been attempting this feat for the past 14 years (eight of them at The University of Winnipeg and the last six at Carleton), they asked me to address this subject.

As a student of administration, I was aware that most senior executives in the private sector (and in government departments and crown corporations as well) depend to a considerable extent on three factors in discharging their managerial responsibilities - authority, communication, and evaluation. And so, after briefing them on some of the main features that distinguish universities from the kinds of organizations for which they are responsible, I talked to them about the degree to which those three factors can be relied upon in the management of higher education. I'll share that analysis with you because you might be interested in extending its application to schools and boards of education.

In regard to authority structures, the authority within universities is much more diffused and their structures are much more confused than are those of the organizations that most presidents manage. For starters, I explained to my corporate counterparts that our governance arrangements are bicameral in nature: the University Senate (comprised largely of faculty and students) is the senior policy-making body for such academic matters as who is admitted, what gets taught, and who graduates; the Board of Governors (comprised largely of external community members) is the senior policy-making body for such business-type matters as finances, facilities, and personnel. So we have an academic decision-making structure that is highly democratic in nature and operates as a collegium, and we have an administrative decision-making structure that is hierarchical in nature and operates as a bureaucracy.

Thus, we have two very different and sometimes conflicting worlds within the university which, nevertheless, are mutually dependent. The only agent that is in a position to provide the essential linkage between them is the President, who chairs the Senate and is the Board's executive officer. And while he/she can rely on the authority of position in directing the administrative side of the operation, the authority for determining academic directions rests on the specialized expertise of individual faculty members. Moreover, because the

structure is typically enshrined for each institution in an Act of the provincial government it cannot be changed without re-opening the university's very existence in the legislature, and we don't want to risk what might happen if that possibility were offered.

Further complicating these confused and diffused authority structures in the university is a network of unions and other employee groups; we have ten of them at Carleton, and each has a different community of interest, orientation toward work, understanding of the institution, and set of expectations and demands. In general terms, the academic groups believe correctly that they do the work for which the institution was established; the non-academic groups sometimes consider faculty members to be unappreciative of their essential contributions and to be inept at such operational tasks as staff supervision. Here, too, it is the president and his/her senior executives who are responsible for trying to orchestrate these diverse instruments so that some kind of publicly recognizable music comes out at the end in the form of a unified direction and a coherent image. Under these circumstances, melody is a challenge and harmony is impossible.

Moreover, no matter how successful one may be in establishing some semblance of authority, the university is always at the mercy of "flavour-of-the-month" whims in government

policy which can suddenly overtake or undermine any internally-driven direction of the institution. And yet, somehow, universities have survived for many centuries.

The communication complexities that we face in such an environment are obviously awesome. To begin with, I told my business colleagues that each of the constituencies comprising each of the structures contains diverse views and vast differences both within itself and between it and the others; and all of them differ in understandings about and aspirations for the university from the multitude of external constituencies which we are supposed to satisfy - all levels of government, counterparts across Canada and in other countries, business corporations and societal agencies, suppliers and providers, clients and employers, alumni and citizens in general - and all of them differ from one another. And I haven't yet even mentioned the group that most people consider to be our primary constituency - the students - who number over 20,000 at Carleton, come from across the country and around the world, represent a tremendous variety of abilities and objectives, span an age range of 70 years and an almost unlimited ethnic spectrum, and extend from immature frosh through career-oriented professionals and senior citizens to Ph.D. scholars - not to mention the hundreds that come and go in our various non-credit programs.

So it is impossible to communicate unified, coherent messages that will be meaningful to all of our constituents; and even if it were possible, many of them are simply unreachable by any single medium. In essence, then, we have an institution whose complexity requires effective communication but whose components render that unattainable. Thus the lack of communication is universally bemoaned, and the blame for it is placed directly in the president's office.

One is tempted in this dilemma to simply let the product tell the tale. However, unlike most private-sector organizations, we face evaluation obstacles that prevent us from convincingly measuring the results of our endeavours. I reminded my fellow presidents that the university's three major functions of research, teaching, and service are so intricately inter-related and inter-dependent that none of them can reasonably be split off and evaluated on its own. But even if it could, the nature of each function is such that its results cannot be validly determined. How, for example, do you know what a piece of basic research conducted today might eventually lead to? The McMaster scholar who recently won a Nobel Prize got it for work he had done 50 years ago because of progress that derived from it over the intervening half-century; no one at the time could possibly have recognized the value it would ultimately take on. Similarly, how can one measure the success of a particular

teaching interaction? Effective learning results from a mix of many personal and situational characteristics along with numerous life experiences besides those in a given classroom setting, and the consequences of teaching typically do not become apparent until long after a given interaction with an individual instructor. Evaluating our community service function is not much easier: while a university person may well, through consultation, have an impact on the development of policies, programs, products or practices, how much influence to ascribe to that particular consultant and the relative quality of his/her work cannot be accurately "unwrapped".

Thus, when accountability advocates demand evidence of the value added by universities in relation to the resources provided for them, the answers that we can give are only rudimentary, often misleading, and seldom persuasive. And again, the president "carries the can" for the resulting dissatisfaction.

This means that the reliance of many C.E.O.'s on authority, communication, and evaluation is simply not available to the presidents of universities. So the management problems that we face are both immense and intractable. Therein lies the frustration of my job - and its challenge. We know despairingly

that we can't win, but we enjoy masochistically the effort of trying - at least for a while.

I concluded my remarks by observing that university management is characterized by an inherent incompatibility: because the university depends on freedom and diverse views while management relies on control and unified vision, the term "university management" is a virtual oxymoron. University presidents can indicate some priorities, they can allocate some resources, and they can shout, urge, cajole, and try to enchant - but they cannot manage in the generally accepted definition of that term. So the main challenge of the university president is to try and keep his/her institution out of trouble, to control damage, to scrounge for support, and to get out of the way. I shall have enjoyed trying for 15 years and, as you know, I have decided that by then it will be time for me to get out of the way. But I do so with a deep appreciation for the privilege I have enjoyed of exercising stewardship over one of this country's finest and most vital institutions of higher education - blessed especially, as Carleton is, by its location in our academically enriching national capital. And this region -- indeed, this country -- is blessed by Carleton, confusing at times though we may be.

Conclusion

I conclude now by confirming that I have learned to confront the confusion I face as a university president through following the same advice I gave you in dealing with yours. I have decided that one cannot meet all the expectations held for one's performance; that you can't even identify them, let alone predict them; and that confusion is therefore a part of the job description. Consequently, the most important expectations to be satisfied are one's own. It has worked for me, and it will for you too.

I wish you well, and I thank you for your attention.